

SERVICE

USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

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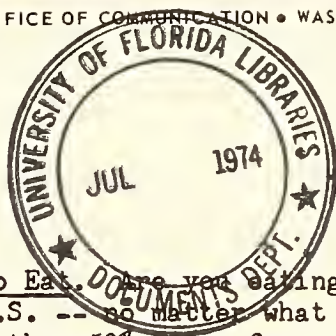
NO. 117

FOOD IS . . .

More Than Just Something To Eat. Are you eating right? About 50% of the people in the U.S. -- no matter what their incomes -- are not. Diets of the other 50% range from only fair to good. It's a fact that a society that has the greatest food production and distribution system in history also has produced millions of people who suffer the often subtle, but health-destroying effects of poor nutrition. Whether through apathy or lack of knowledge about nutrition, many Americans just are not eating properly. Concern over this fact is the basis for a joint government-industry nutrition education campaign initiated in December. The nationwide campaign, being promoted as a public service by the Advertising Council, is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the National Academy of Sciences, and the Grocery Manufacturers of America. A key part of the program is a 32-page booklet entitled "Food Is More Than Just Something To Eat" -- the slogan of the campaign. This booklet gives information in readable language and attractive color illustrations on the nutritive contents of foods, which ones are the best sources of various nutrients, and how to combine them into a healthful, balanced diet. It explains some facts of life such as what a child eats affects the way he grows and develops, what a young girl eats today may have an effect on the kind of pregnancy she will have years from now, what a person eats at any age can affect the length and quality of his life. Single free copies of the booklet can be requested by writing NUTRITION, PUEBLO, COLORADO 81009. Copies are not available free in bulk, however, information on purchasing quantities is available from George W. Hayden, Advertising Council, 825 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022; telephone 212-758-0400.

FOOD PRICES

No Wonder They Rose. Looking for a clear explanation of why food prices jumped this year? The November issue of USDA's National Food Situation contains one, entitled, "1973 in Perspective." It explains the joint effects on prices of smaller food supplies, soaring foreign demand, a superheated economy, dollar devaluation, and shifting economic programs. Copies are available on request from Economic Research Service, Information Division, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.



WINTER FOOD PREVIEW

Food prices may increase modestly this winter after leveling out in the fall. Barring renewed world food shortages or a serious pinch in fuel, food should be more abundant and price increases much smaller in 1974.

Seasonal supply increases beginning in September brought more meat into the market and lower prices for beef, pork, eggs, chicken, and fresh vegetables. The price declines kept fall food prices at about the same level as summer prices. So, for all of 1973, economists calculate retail food prices will average about 14 percent higher than in 1972.

Winter beef prices will be up somewhat from fall, but still below the levels of last summer. Less beef for winter is the result of a cutback in the number of young cattle brought into feeding lots last spring and summer because of high costs and the effects of retail price ceilings. A backlog of young cattle going into feed lots this fall and winter will increase beef supplies by late spring.

There will be less pork and lamb available this winter, but chicken supplies will remain about the same. Prices of all will be up some. After winter, chicken supplies will get a moderate boost, pork supplies will hold steady, and lamb will continue in tighter supply following a long decline in sheep numbers.

You will likely see progressively lower egg prices this winter. After a prolonged cutback caused by high costs and controls, poultrymen are gearing up for a lot more eggs.

Americans ate less turkey this Thanksgiving when faced with retail prices well above a year ago. But those higher prices are likely to bring out a big increase in turkey production throughout next year -- accompanied by lower prices.

Unlike most other livestock-related food products, milk production is not likely to recover in 1974. Many dairy farmers quit production this year, faced with increased costs, shortage of farm help, and better alternative opportunities. Larger imports of cheese, butter, and dry milk helped maintain domestic supplies in 1973. But with fewer cows left, milk output is sagging and those gradual increases in milk and dairy products prices will likely continue next year.

Consumers are buying fish despite record prices. Frozen fish fillets -- cod, flounder, ocean perch, and haddock -- were relatively abundant at last count and good stocks of canned sardines and tuna have limited price rises. But frozen fish sticks, frozen fish portions, and shrimp, not to mention canned salmon, are in tight supply due to declines in imports and catches and increased consumer demand.

As cold weather drives fresh vegetable crops south in the winter, many migrate to Mexico. So, you will get Mexican tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and eggplants to supplement Florida and California produce. Although some seasonal price increases can be expected this winter, retail fresh vegetable prices may average close to those of last winter.

Dry beans and peas have been caught in the crossfire of world protein shortages and their prices have zoomed on world markets. In the supermarkets, bean and pea prices are already double or triple the prices of a year ago and little decrease is expected before next fall.

Despite a large onion crop, prices are moving up again as exports to Japan increased sharply this season. Potato prices dropped briefly in early fall, but prices will rise again during the winter months. The crop was one of the smallest in recent years. More than half of our potatoes, by the way, are processed to become frozen fries, flakes, chips, and other food forms.

Along the canned food shelves and frozen food aisles, prices rose this year, but only a third of the average for all grocery foods. Further price rises in canned and frozen vegetables may be expected: Supplies for the balance of this marketing season are about the same or slightly less than the relatively tight supplies on hand a year ago.

Citrus is a good bet for fruit shoppers. Winter is peak harvest time, and we have another large crop -- though it is expected to be slightly below last year's record harvest. The orange crop is a little smaller than last year's and prices may be a little higher than last winter for fresh oranges and fresh chilled juice. Frozen orange juice will remain an excellent buy. Fresh grapefruit will go down in price seasonally this winter. However, with a smaller Arizona crop this year, lemons are more costly. Processing takes half of our lemons, nearly three-fifths of our grapefruit, and four-fifths of the oranges.

Noncitrus fruit supplies are much more abundant than a year ago, thanks in large part to grapes: After a disastrous crop failure last year, grape production increases this season account for about half of the supply advances. Apples and fresh winter pears are features for this winter also. Strong consumer demand for noncitrus fruits, though, is keeping prices somewhat higher than a year ago.

CURRENT IN THE NEWS

Electricity And The Energy Crisis. Electricity is such a common item in our lives that we take it for granted the light will come on at the flip of a switch and the water will be hot at the turn of a faucet. It is shocking to realize there is a possibility electric power may not be ours to command with such ease. And there are those bills that must be paid: The one paid in cash each month and the one paid in natural resources used to produce electric power. "How To Save On Your Electric Bill," a publication from the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, offers some common sense tips on how to use electricity more efficiently in your home -- and cut the cost of both bills. The 20-page, illustrated booklet includes sections on air conditioning, home heating, hot water, laundry, small and large appliances, lighting, and other users of electricity. Single free copies of "How To Save On Your Electric Bill," (CES 512) are available from the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service, Mail Room, Hutcheson Hall, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VPI&SU), Blacksburg, Va. 24061. Bulk orders may be purchased from the Virginia Farm and Home Electrification Council, VPI&SU, Blacksburg, Va. 24061. Information on price can be obtained from that address or by calling 703-591-6809.

OUTLOOK SOONER

Conference Set For December. Housing, energy, clothing and textiles, and food will be among the consumer topics discussed during the Family Living Sessions of the National Agricultural Outlook Conference. The conference is being held in Washington, D.C., Dec. 17, 18, and 19 -- two months earlier than usual -- to give farmers and farm suppliers more time to plan for the 1974 food production. The annual event is sponsored by the Economic Research Service, Extension Service, and the Agricultural Research Service and brings together Extension specialists and economists from government, business, and the universities for a look at food production, marketing, the general economy, agribusiness, and family economics in the coming year. Sessions are open to the public and there is no registration fee.

CHARTING AGRICULTURE'S STORY

Pick A Table And Pull Up A Chart. The 1973 Handbook of Agricultural Charts is now off the press. This reference book contains 186 charts -- most with supporting tables -- depicting what's happening in the general economy, the farm commodity scene, foreign agricultural trade, marketing, farm population, and family levels of living. The year's edition has an expanded rural development section and a new section on women. The handbook is especially helpful to economists and businessmen in determining trends. Teachers and program leaders will find the handbook, plus color slides and black and white prints of the charts, useful in classroom, conference and meeting presentations. Single copies of the 1973 Handbook of Agricultural Charts (AH-455) are free from the Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. The color slides are 25 cents each or \$25 for a complete set of 184 frames. The black and white prints are 8x10 glossies and sell for \$2.40 each. The visual materials can be ordered from the Photography Division, Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

FORCED RETIREMENT

Rest In Pieces. USDA food economists regretfully anticipate the passing of a faithful friend, the 10-cent candy bar. The bar became popular in 1968 as the 5-cent bar went into decline. Since then, the 10-center has served dutifully as an inexpensive source of quick energy and gooey pleasure, fitting into the budget of even the most modest allowance. It was in relatively good health until this year when it suffered successive attacks of costly cocoa, spiralling sugar prices, high-priced peanuts, and the enlargement of its manufacturing bill. As the 10-cent bar is forced into retirement, the 15-cent bar is already on the way as next year's standard snack replacement.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write: Lillie Vincent, Editor of SERVICE, Office of Communication, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250. Telephone (202) 447-5437.
